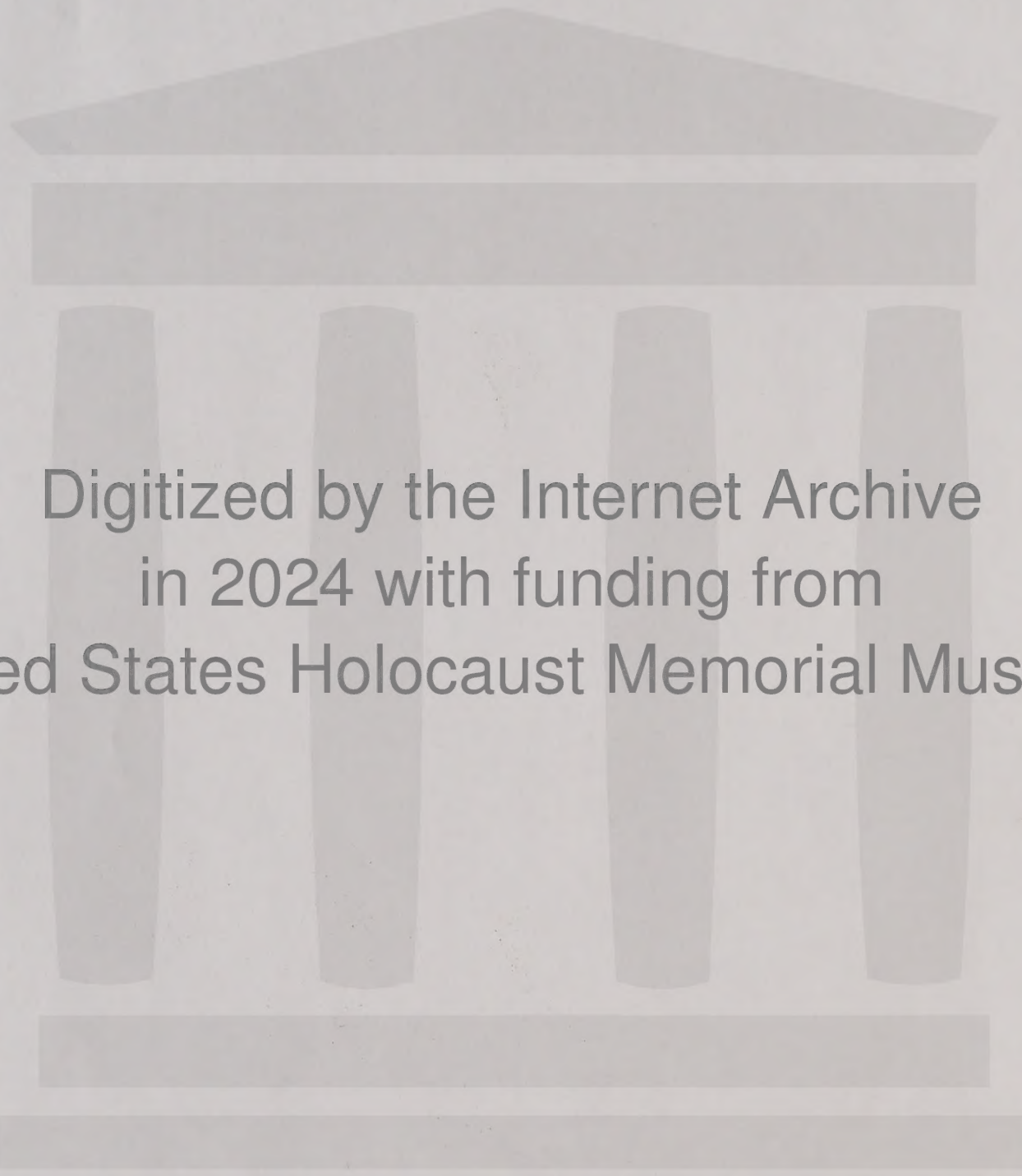




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YETTA ROSENBERG

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SURVIVING THE HOLOCAUST

On September 26, 1938 Hitler annexed part of Czechoslovakia known as Sudetenland, while promising that this would be his last territorial demand in Europe. In reality he had made already plans to invade Poland and most of Europe. His main concern was the opposition and reaction of the Soviet Union. Secretly, Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Soviet counterpart Viacheslav Molotov had secret negotiations. On August 23, 1939 they signed a joint Non-Aggression Pact. It stipulated the territorial division of Poland, dividing it between their countries and their spheres of influence. On September 1, 1939 Nazi Germany invaded the heartland of Poland and on September 17, 1939 the Soviet forces occupied Eastern Poland. That triggered World War Two.

I was born and lived in the town of Jeziezany. My mother, Goldie Schuesler, and my father, Moshe Halevi Schuesler, was an ardent follower of Rabbi Izchab Myer Heshel of the Kopinitzer rabbinic dynasty. My father was a successful grain exporter. Both of my parents came from well to do families. When I was two years old, my mother volunteered to prepare for the Pesach Holiday for a sick sister in law. My mother became ill on the first day of Pesach and passed away on the fourth day of Chol Hamoed. I had three sibling sisters; I was the youngest. My father loved me to no end, and although he also made efforts to replace a mother's love, he never remarried. My sisters always catered to me, when I grew up I appreciated their dedication to the welfare of their baby-sister. My siblings had always prepared for all of the holidays, but Passover was always subdued because of our mother's Yahrzeit.

Regina, my sister, married her husband Mendel Mass, a native of the City of Tanopol. He operated a wholesale and a retail imported fruit business in this large city. In 1937 I came to live with them in order to enroll in Teachers Seminarium, and passed the oral and written test. I made many new friends and participated in Zionist Youth activities, and attended classes of Hebrew in the "Tarbut" school.

During the Soviet occupation of this part of Poland we were treated well. Anti-Semitism was subdued, and officially did not exist. Today, this is part of Ukraine.

On June 22, 1941 a black cloud appeared unexpectedly. Operation Barbarosa began, a massive German force on air and land attacked the unprepared Soviet units. The existing Non-Aggression Pact became null and void. The Nazis ordered the extermination of the Jewish population. At Babi Yar, the SS herded thirty thousand Jews into a ravine and ordered them to dig a huge mass grave and then executed them. In Tarnopol several hundred Jews were killed with iron bars by local anti-Semites on the city's streets.

My sister, Regina, gave birth to her first child, Goldie (now Gloria) on June 2, 1941. Mendel Mass, her husband, lost his business and all of us were forced into ghetto quarters. Forced labor was initiated, and Mendel was arrested and sent away to a camp where he lost his life in a few weeks. I was forced to labor in a camp in Czestyluw (a suburb of Tarnopol) where many Jewish females cleaned bricks of demolished buildings. We lived in old dilapidated quarters, and the cooking was done by a retired schoolteacher. My responsibilities were concentrated on helping my sister and her infant daughter. Food was very hard to get. The Nazis had quotas for the farmers to deliver most of their products for their needs. As I was outside the ghetto, I bartered for some food for them. A local gentile, Janek, agreed to be paid to smuggle

Regina and baby Goldie out of ghetto and placed them in the attic of my quarters.

In the meantime we found out that in Jeziezany all the Jews were liquidated and we lost our beloved father, two sisters and their families. We cried bitterly over this terrible loss. Our nights were sleepless. Our life was now in great danger every minute of the day. We were drowning and tried to hold on in desperation. When I think now of how I survived this ordeal that befell us I am amazed. I was desperate, knowing that soon this camp would be liquidated along with all of its workers.

I met Mrs. Pacieszwiecka who was the landowner of this village, Czestyluw. She was hiding a group of Jews on her estate in exchange for their labor. I told her of my predicament, and she agreed to place my sister and baby in one of her servants quarters. One night in the fall of 1942, the SS and local police arrested all of her employees and took them into custody. My sister, with her baby in her arms, escaped into the nearby field. Regina knew that her cousin, Leib Fishman, had a friend in the neighboring village... Stefan and his wife Hania. Twice weekly the couple went to town by bike. She watched them for long time, and finally spotted them and, on their way back, they took her with them. Regina found our cousin Leib Fishman and his grown daughter. By recommendation, Janek found a home for baby Goldie; a childless couple agreed to take the fair complexioned, blond infant. An oral agreement stipulated that if the mother didn't survive the Holocaust, the baby would remain theirs. Just imagine Regina's and my feelings while leaving her only child with strangers. We parted with the baby, that day, with tears and pain. Some moments we regretted our choice, but it was our only alternative. Thinking that we may never see Goldie again, I was in shock and trembled. My sister sobbed hysterically. We heard the latest news, that in Kolomaye the Jews were forced to dig huge graves, and when finished, the Gestapo began shooting, filling

them without passion. Babies were thrown into the air and the machine gunners use them as targets.

Frank Hawryliszen, the master mason of the project that I was employed for, had pity on me. He was Ukranian, his wife Julia was Polish, and they had two daughters ages two and nine. I gave them all of my belongings and all of my better clothes. Gradually, Julia sold it on the black market to buy food for all of us. Frank constructed a hollow brick oven in the house, hollow inside and open on the top. As soon as the kids fell asleep, I crawled out from top opening. There was a room for me, and an old couch where I slept thru the night. During the daytime, I was in the oven in a standing position, leaning with my back against the existing wall.

One night, two retreating German soldiers and their dog knocked at the door asking for lodging for the night. Everyone was scared, as I was still in hiding in the oven. Tearful and scared the whole night, I asked for divine mercy. In the morning they left without incident. The days became longer and the patience shorter. All the Nazi gains on the eastern front crumbled. Field Marshal Paulus signed the formal surrender of Stalingrad on February 3, 1943. Lack of food and hard cold weather had left many dead and starving. The Gestapo and SS had made every effort to liquidate any Jews left as they retreated. They retreated with speed and came very close to Tarnopol. Rumors circulated that Ruska Street (connected to a major highway) was dynamited by the retreating Nazi forces. My keepers became very alarmed and scared. Frank and Julia packed up a couple of suitcases and locked the doors securely with me inside. Panic and fear overtook me and I found a side door to get out. Now I saw people in the thousands were leaving the city to save their lives. On the way, I approached an old man to help him with his luggage with the massive load that he carried. I told him that I was just released from the hospital and didn't have anything with me. He finally became suspicious and

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took back his suitcase from me. With the Almighty's blessing he crossed himself in prayer for me.

I followed the crowd and wound up in a farm overnight. The population in this part of Poland was about forty percent Ukrainian and I spoke both languages perfectly. On the way to the city, in the early morning hours, I befriended two sisters and two of their children. Having pity on my situation, they gave me half a loaf of bread, and invited me to the house. The lady of the house was cooking a vegetable soup and treated with me a nice portion. When I returned to quarters of my hiding place, I found no one there. When I looked in the back yard I noticed a cellar with potatoes and crawled in. Hiding there for fourteen days I nourished myself with the half loaf of bread and falling snow. It was late March 1943. All of a sudden two little girls came to the cellar for potatoes, and let out a shriek that a Jew was hiding there. I thought that was the end of me. A short while later a woman came to the cellar with a bottle of hot tea, and told me "when it will be dark toward the evening, you will come to stay in my place." She did as she said and treated me very well. In the meantime the Soviet occupied the city after severe fighting for several days.

The seasons had changed. My sister found out about where I was, and also learned the whereabouts of baby Goldie. On a Thursday in May, Regina, our protégé in hiding Bohene, and I went to the Greek Orthodox orphanage with a heavy heart, and met the sister Superior in her habit, anxious to reclaim our child. The mother superior was very friendly, but told us that she did not know of a child as we described her. Regina was crying bitterly; that broke my heart. I started to convince the nun that we had reliable information that she lives here. Finally she agreed to take us around in this huge room, where all the children were sleeping. We walked many rows of beds, some were just napping. I stopped

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at one bed and laid my hand on my niece Goldie's head and said that this was our child. Goldie was sleeping on her right side, and I noticed that she has a birth mark, the same as I do. The sister woke her and said "Anna, you have some visitors." Goldie's assigned name in the orphanage was Anna Butrin.. The Mother Superior became much softer and her approach more forthcoming. She addressed her in Ukrainian, asking "which of the three standing women is your mother?" She pointed with her fingers to Regina saying this is my real mother. She also indicated to the nun that "you are my mother, but not my real mother."

The woman accompanying us was the one we had given Goldie to for safekeeping. But, neighbors knew that this childless person was keeping a Jewish child and notified to the SS Gendarmerie. Goldie was taken to the police station. There she was asked and shown a Talith if her father owned one. She was only two years old and probably responded "no". Then they gave her monetary coins, to test her Jewish traits of liking money. She refused the coins. The SS decided to place her in the orphanage. Imagine... she was wearing the same shoes that she wore when we'd given her away. Her head was shaved and covered with a cradle rash. On her back she had a large abscess full of puss. By the end, the Mother Superior asked where we were going, since we hadn't a place to live. The greatest surprise came now when we were told that Anna Butrin (Goldie) was scheduled to be adopted this coming Sunday by a single female. My sister and I became very emotional and hysterical and we were both in tears. By sheer luck and providential intervention, we saved that child. Imagine if my sister and I had missed this Thursday in May 1943. A lifetime of agony and sorrow would have stayed with us.

As we left the orphanage, I held her in my arms and felt her warmth. She then kissed her mother warmly, like saying thank you for taking me out from this place. We were looking for a physician to lance her boil, because she was in pain and crying.

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We met a man who lived in the outskirts of the city whose house was not disturbed. He offered us lodging in an empty dwelling. All three of us slept there thru the night.

The Nazis made forceful efforts to hold their position, but after two days of heavy fighting the Germans capitulated with heavy losses on both sides. I decided then, while the baby was in constant pain, to pull the skin off the boil and force it open. Finally, I was successful and lots of puss came out and Goldie felt better. We found now a place to live in Tarnopol, and I was accepted by the Soviet authorities as a telephone operator. Once a day we received a meal at work, a small loaf of bread and two boiled eggs. Part of it was put into my pockets to bring home for Regina and Goldie.

When Goldie became disobedient, I punished her, telling her to stay in the corner for several minutes. She then teased me by singing lyrics..."My Aunt – you're a Polack, but I'm a Ukrainian." When we walked with her on the street and passed Christian clergy members, she ran after them to greet them. She knelt and kissed the rings on their fingers. Mornings she recited the Lord's Prayer. Gradually we taught her that we were Jewish and removed the medallion of St. Gabriel that she had on her neck even while sleeping.

As the war came to an end this part of Poland became Soviet territory. All Polish citizens were given a chance to remain or were allowed to return to Poland. We decided to move West and wound up in the town of Walbrzych on the new German border. Many homes and apartments were not occupied, because many German citizens were forced out by the Polish Government and some voluntarily left. From there we traveled by train to Germany. In the town of Schwandorf, in Bavaria, we found the family of Esther Appelbaum and her children. We knew them from back home, and they took us in to live with them. The UNRA had supplies food rations for the arriving refugees. There I was

told of a Major Butler with the US Army who was a landsmann, who would help get in touch with relatives in America.

He had mailed a letter by US mail to my father's cousin, Eli Lassner, in New York. The response came very quickly by telegram, asking what he could do to help. Shortly thereafter we received three affidavits, and were now placed on the waiting list for a visa to the United States. It was around October 1945. Soon we were interviewed by the CIA prior to receiving our visas.

In Schwandorf I met Sam (my husband to be). Sam was active in this Jewish community in the vicinity of the concentration camp from which he was liberated. Through him I was introduced to Rabbi Westreich who made contact with Rita Schliven, the Secretary to the American Council in Munich. The two of us met Rita, her mother and young daughter in her spacious apartment in Munich. On her recommendation I got a job as the receptionist and translator in the Funkcasserne. This was the office for candidates to immigrate to the USA.

In April 1947, we left from Bremenhaven on the American Liberty ship "Marylyn Marlin" for the USA. At Ellis Island we were greeted by Kalman Lassner, a cousin. He and his wife were very generous and located all three of us in his small apartment in Brooklyn. Sam came to New York from Chicago, where he'd settled with relatives. We were married in this apartment on June 22nd by Rabbi Shepsel Friedman. He was a distant relative. Many opportunities were offered in New York, but Sam was not pleased with the offers, because he has better aspirations. We decided to move to Chicago where Sam had already a job at a major department store. I got a job at the same store where Sam was employed.

I thank the Almighty for all the favors despite all past disappointments in life, and many hardships that we have endured.

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O sing unto the Lord a new song.
Sing unto the Lord, bless his name.
Proclaim his salvation from day to day.
His marvelous works among all the peoples.
(Psalm 96:1-2)

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear O Zion.
Do not let your hands become weak.
The Lord your God is in your midst
A warrior who will save.
(Zephaniah 3}16-17)

